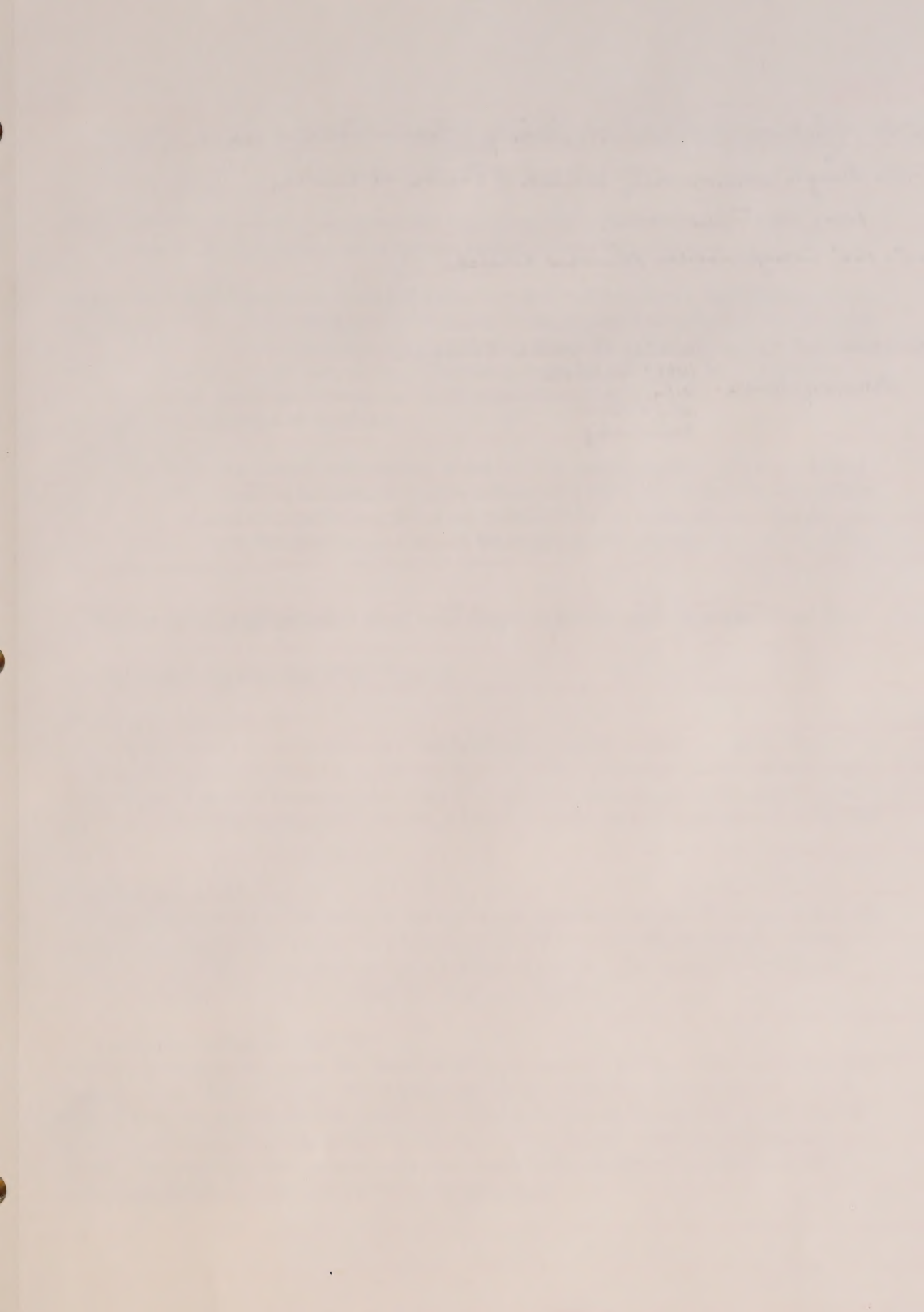




Notes

25-40 Single cell church. - Family - Pastor lasts 3 years.

85-100 Single community church - Pastor at center,

1 on 1 pastoral care.

135-165 Comfortable Pastoral Church

Newcomers need guide to your church.

Discovery classes -

INTRO to church
Gifts
H&P + Bible
membership

Inclusion of Newcomers into Membership

developed by Rev. Elder Don Eastman

Definition of Inclusion: The incorporation of newcomers into regular attendance and participation in the church; this may or may not include formal membership.

Do you have the information required to inform you how well newcomers are incorporated into the life and ministry of your congregation? You can't manage what you can't measure! Essential to any viable intentional effort at incorporating as many newcomers as possible into your church is the need for tracking of vital information. This means registration of attendance followed by database management of the information. Other information to be managed in your database is participation in subgroups of the church.

Key Point: *Inclusion is about relationships, about building new friendships.* It's about finding new friends with something in common! People with whom a newcomer shares a bond of affinity. (This is very different from the homogeneous unit principle.) In the words of mega-church planter Robert Logan, "People come to a church for many reasons; they stay for one...relationships!"

Three group dynamics that will impact inclusion in your church:

The Dynamics of group size: (Peter Wagner)

Celebration: more than 60

This dynamic centers on the experience of celebration when all the membership gathers for worship. The sense of celebration occurs more easily in larger gatherings than in smaller groups. There often is a sense of anonymity that is attractive to many newcomers in larger gatherings of celebration. The "critical mass" for achieving a more consistent sense of celebration is usually 100 or more.

Congregation: 17-59

This provides the sense of fellowship; in this size group, there is the feeling of knowing others and being known. In smaller churches the whole congregation is such a fellowship circle. In larger congregations, sub-congregational groups provide this dynamic. This sense of fellowship can sometimes extend up to 100-120 people in a single congregation.

Cell: less than 16 (best less than 10)

Usually known as small groups, this size of gathering is more of a kinship circle, where individuals develop a close "family" feeling. While intentional groups of this size fill an important need for many in a church, and can provide definite opportunities for incorporation of newcomers, not all people in a church will feel the need to be involved in small groups. There is a philosophy of ministry that uses such small groups as the central organizing principle of the church, in which case all people are encouraged to participate in cell groups.

The Dynamics of Church Size: (two models: Schaller and Rothauge)

Family Church: less than 50

This is usually a single-cell church very much like a family, often with a gatekeeper to facilitate a newcomer's entry or exclusion, and matriarch or patriarch to give a stamp-of-approval. In most of these churches the pastor is not the matriarch/patriarch or gatekeeper. Joining the church is similar to "marrying into" a clan or being "adopted."

Pastoral Church: 50-150

The matriarch or patriarch is replaced by a leadership circle, usually with the pastor at the center. Often there is the expectation that the pastor will be involved in all activities of the church. Here, the pastor's role becomes central to bonding with newcomers. Problems can emerge with recruitment and inclusion because of the limitations of the number of newcomers the pastor can deal with at one time.

Program Church: 150-350

In this size church, the pastor can no longer attend personally to all the people so work is delegated to lay people and committees. The pressures of coordination and management supercede attention of the pastor to newcomers. Congregational life is less unified in this size church and usually gathers around several centers; there are now sub-congregations. Entry and inclusion occurs in a subgroup rather than the whole. Newcomers may experience several entry and incorporating experiences.

Corporation Church: more than 350:

In this size church the role of the Senior Pastor is very different; a symbol of leadership, unity and stability in a much more complex organization. Newcomers are acquainted and incorporated through contacts and relationships with leaders of sub-congregations or cells. Inclusion systems are increasingly sophisticated and important.

The Dynamics of Church Status: (Robert E. Logan)

Rapid Growth

--positive attitude toward change--easy inclusion of newcomers--emergence of leadership--people taking new risks/challenges--ease of belonging--flexibility --developing a dream (capacity to incorporate newcomers may be inadequate)

On A Plateau

--not as responsive to new people--new people have to fit mold--dream takes form--belonging becomes more difficult--old guard emerges; decision making slows--still a healthy church

Mature and Declining

--goal is reached--buildings are paid for--tenure is important in decision making--lives off its memories--groups become distinct/rigid--defends the past (when you burn the mortgage, the church dies)

Flow Through 20-37% per year. 66% were not involved in another church when they came to HCC. 86% have Xian background. Many have been away for a long time. 4% have no prior religious background.

multiple points of entry - front door = Sunday worship
side door - small groups

The organizational dynamics of group size

1. Characteristics of size and predictable plateaus

- a. **25-40 at worship** -- A single-cell group, lay owned and lay operated, usually unable to compensate a full-time pastor, often sees itself as a family. More than half of all MCC congregations are in this category.
- b. **85-100 at worship** -- Sees itself as a community built on a network of one-to-one relationships with the pastor at the center, highly values the fellowship characteristics of this size, frequently has difficulty in *adequately* compensating a full-time pastor.
- c. **135-165 at worship** -- the most comfortable plateau, highly self-sufficient, also retains strong fellowship characteristics, can comfortably compensate the pastor, but starting to need more staff support.
- d. **175-240 at worship** -- the most uncomfortable plateau, facing the "200 Barrier", losing the fellowship characteristic of smaller churches, can't afford the staff needed to become larger, feels like a big church trying to be small or a small church trying to be big. Has increasing need for sub-group structures and decreasing ability for the pastor to be the hub of one-to-one relationships.
- e. **300-450 at worship** -- a more comfortable plateau, has a multiple full-time staff usually of 3-5 employees including the Senior Pastor, has the resources and size to achieve a higher level of celebration and quality in worship, sub-groups and programs provide fellowship characteristics.
- f. **500-700 at worship** -- a full-service church with a staff-centered ministry usually using 6 or more full-time employees; very attractive to younger generations, much more emphasis on quality of programs and services.

2. Variation in needs and styles of local church governance.

- a. **25-45 at worship** -- a handful of volunteers "run the church", if there is a Pastor, he/she frequently does not become an influential policy maker before three or four years but pastoral tenure usually does not extend beyond four years. The structure, role and process of the Board of Directors is very informal.
- b. **45-125 at worship** -- a second pattern of governance usually appears: structure becomes more prominent. The Board of Directors and the Pastor, usually in that order, have most of the authority to make policy decisions. Frequently, the Board members (sometimes with much help from the Pastor) do everything. This is the ultimate example of a "working" Board.
- c. **120-240 at worship** -- the distribution of influence and power has changed, the Pastor is the number-one authority figure and the Board second. A larger share of power is deposited in committees; a "working" Board structure is still common. One example of this is the Board where each member chairs a standing committee.
- d. **225-450 at worship** -- the Pastor holds a remarkably large amount of power, usually accumulated through three or more of the following sources: skill, knowledge, racial or ethnic or national or religious subculture, leadership ability, initiative, productivity, competence as a preacher-teacher-administrator-worship leader-pastor, tenure, seniority, age, experience, or personality. Sometimes a substantial chunk of power and influence is held by other paid staff members. Board committees often become increasingly dependent on the Senior Pastor or paid staff persons. The shift now begins from a "working" Board" to a "policy" Board.
- e. **450-1200 at worship** -- The major sources of power are information, competence, commitment, time, and specialized skills, most of which is found in the Senior Pastor and the full-time professional staff. The Board of Directors is increasingly dependent on the data base that such staff bring to the policy-making table. Sometimes this power is shared by staff and volunteers working on various program, administrative or ad hoc committees upon whom the Board will depend for its singular focus on policy.

The experience of newcomers in your church:

You get one chance to make a first impression!

How do newcomers experience your church? What are the points of entry to your church? The worship service, small groups, special events? Increasingly the trend is toward multiple points of entry, seven days a week. However, for most MCCs (especially smaller churches) Sunday worship will continue to be the primary point of entry for newcomers. *What do visitors experience in your worship service?* User-friendly access and ample parking? An uplifting, joyous, inspiring and celebrative event? A warm, caring and welcoming congregation? Someone to intentionally welcome them *following* the worship service? A comfortable, clean and inviting facility? All of these make powerful first impressions.

Are newcomers considered visitors or guests, are they met by greeters or hosts, do they encounter gatekeepers or sponsors in your church?

Visitors reside temporarily, a short stay for a particular purpose; guests are persons welcomed and extended hospitality. Greeters give a formal welcome in a specific manner; hosts take particular concern that guests are well accommodated. Sponsors are those people who help facilitate the entrance of newcomers into the church; gatekeepers are those who screen newcomers out. Every church requires interpretation for newcomers. Hosts and sponsors do two things: They provide helpful information, and they link guests with key people (such as church leaders and people with whom the newcomer is likely to have something in common.) Does your church have an intentional, organized approach for trained volunteers to welcome newcomers?

How can newcomers discover new relationships in your church?

Do you regularly plan and schedule events designed to help newcomers connect with other people? Eating out together after the worship service? Opportunities to meet the pastor and other leaders? A newcomers class with information about the church and opportunity to meet new people? An invitation to meet in a small group? New face to face groups that will meet several times? Intentional plans to conduct such types of activities increases the possibility that newcomers will discover new friendships in your church!

What are the follow-up actions taken by your church to communicate with newcomers?

Does your church register attendance? Does your church identify newcomers? How? (Note: many will not want to raise their hand or be otherwise conspicuously identified publicly.) Do you tell guests what will be done with the information they give? (Often unchurched people fear they will receive an unannounced visit.) Do you communicate (by phone or letter) with first-time guests within 48 hours of their visit? Do you have an orientation program for newcomers other than your membership classes? What follow-up occurs with second-time guests? Does your church use attendance registration data to track attendance patterns of individuals? Is that information used for follow-up purposes? How often does your church offer membership classes?

The Importance of Small Groups in Your Church

Whether or not your church has intentional cell groups, it is likely that the most of the work and activity of your church is presently occurring through cell-sized groups! Take a moment to create a list of every recurring activity, meeting, or ministry in your church that usually brings an average of sixteen or less people together. The choir? Deacons? Acolytes or altar guild? Pastoral care groups? Intentional cell groups? Athletic teams? Youth groups? Committees? Bible study classes? Twelve-step groups? How many small groups does your church have? For every 100 active members, you should have seven small face-to-face groups. Becoming very intentional and strategic in the development and implementation of cell groups will profoundly impact the inclusion of newcomers into your church.

Two Approaches to Cell Groups

The Program-based Church

The church is structured with ministry programs, often in a conventional hierarchical pattern. Program committees, departments, divisions, directors, and cost centers are typical. Program churches often have well defined small groups, and usually cell groups are one program among others. This is a church with cell groups.

The Cell-based Church or Meta-Church

All programs are virtually eliminated or subsumed in one: cell groups. Cells become the basis for everything the church does. All that the church sees as its ministry is accomplished through cells. In the meta-church model, the two major building blocks (or organizing principles) of the church are *celebration* and *cell*, the worship service and the small group. This is a church of cell groups.

Two Purposes of Cell Groups

Nurture: Groups with this primary purpose place a strong value on bonding and caring. They provide a very powerful sense of community to participants. These groups often become very tight kinship circles and can be resistant to the internal growth that may require multiplication, hence separation.

Mission: The group's primary purpose and organizing principle is fulfilling the mission of the church. For instance, if the church sees its mission as conversion and discipleship of the unchurched, the cell group will intentionally bring in newcomers with the goal of inclusion. As the group grows, it will intentionally divide so the process can be repeated.

Four Functions of Cell Groups (Carl George, Meta-Church)

George has blended the two purposes into four functions for all cell groups in the meta-church model. Individual groups may have a stronger ratio of some of these functions, less of others; a different mix of major and minor emphases. But each group will fit under one of the above two named purposes. The four functions are *Loving*: pastoral care, *Learning*: Bible knowledge, *Deciding*: internal administration, *Doing*: serving needs outside the group.

Conversion

People are converted because of relationships.

Rise of Church - from 12 to 33 million by time of Constantine.

30 years - 65 AD - less people in church than MCC at same age.
grew 40% per decade - MCC 50% growth. Mormons growing at 43% per decade.

Why? Church was able to sustain open social networks to include people in.

Cliques - Need for people to be part of small social network.
Most people have social network of 5-10 - family, coworkers, friends.
Significant 10-15 - sphere of influence.

85% come in by word of mouth. (Influence of another person).

Peter Wagner

3 structures that interplay

1. Celebration - worship - larger group easier.
2. Congregation
3. Cell

Celebration

Sense of celebration needs about 100 people. Music important.
(Church growth - Music + parking!) How can we do it better?

Congregation - community (40-100 people) CHEERS MODEL

You know people - they know you.

Cell - Kinship groups - less than 10 people.

Churches already have small groups - for every 100 people 7 groups.

1. Board

2. Choir

3. Bible Study

4. Growth Group

Supply need.

Danger - Small group can become closed.
Do not want to split up.

add - by addition - add new groups

Resources For Inclusion of New Members

compiled by Rev. Elder Don Eastman; revised October 30, 1997

Highly Recommended:

George, Carl, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1991) This is the key book outlining the meta-church approach to celebration and cell groups. Also read George's sequel, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, A Division of Baker Book House, 1994.) This book provides an extension and expansion of the earlier book, and is filled with superb examples of growing churches using cell groups and celebration as basic building blocks. It is designed to facilitate the staff-to-supervisor group relationships, or the supervisor of groups-to-group leader relationship. In short, it empowers leaders.

Hunter George G. III, *Church For The Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) The author coins the term "apostolic churches" to describe congregations focused on reaching the unchurched. This book provides insight on some of today's most well known mega-churches with a very good view of their approaches to small groups.

Intersection Small Group Series, *Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 1995) This is an excellent beginning guide for small groups in the local church; why to start small groups, how to organize small groups and how to train leaders.

Logan, Robert E., *Beyond Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, A Division of Baker Book House, 1989) In addition to being the best I have seen on the basic principles of church growth, this book has two excellent chapters on Holistic Disciple Making and Expanding Network of Cell Groups. If you only have enough money to buy one book, get this one!

Neighbour, Ralph W., Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here?* (Houston: Touch Publications, Inc., 1990) A guidebook for cell group churches, this is kind of a "bible" to the cell church movement. It provides help for those desiring to build a church that is comprised primarily of a single type of cell groups, and describes many available equipping tools.

Smith, Donald P., *How to Attract and Keep Active Church Members* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). This book is written around a study within the Presbyterian Church USA of what the author calls bonding churches which are compared with high-loss churches.

Snyder, Howard A., *Radical Renewal: The Problem Of Wineskins Today* (Houston: Touch Publications, Inc., 1996) This is a rewrite of Snyder's influential 1975 book, *The Problem of Wineskins*. In this volume the author discusses the biblical and theological issues related to ministry and ministry structures.

Stark, David and Keifert, Patrick, *7 Steps To A Successful Small Group Ministry*, (Minneapolis: Church Innovations Publishing, Inc., 1994) This is the first in a series of seven useful booklets on small group ministry by Church Innovations. Lead author David Stark has previously developed small group materials for Serendipity and now heads this organization dedicated to effective small group ministry. While most cell group systems and materials are developed around models commonly used by evangelical or pentecostal types of churches, Stark's approach is based upon principles proven more useful in mainline types of churches. The whole series is available as a starter pack for \$94.95. Call toll-free 888 223-7631.

Internet Websites:

<http://smallgroups.com/>

Site of the Small Group Network. It has some free useful information and for a membership fee of \$39 per year, you can access additional information and resources.

www.touchusa.org

Site of TOUCH, the Houston-based ministry of cell group guru Ralph Neighbor. It has lots of resources and information on churches built primarily of cell groups.

www.pchurch.com

Site for PowerChurch Plus church management software produced by F1 Software, Ashville NC 28806; phone 800 486-1800

Other Useful Resources:

Arnold, Jeffrey, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992)

Beckham, William A., *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21st Century* (Houston: Touch Publications, Inc., 1997)

Hestenes, Roberta, *Using the Bible in Groups* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983)

Class, Alan C., *In Search of the Unchurched* (Washington DC: The Alban Institute, 1996)

Weeks, Andrew D., *Welcome! Tools & Techniques for New Member Ministry* (Washington DC: The Alban Institute, 1992)

Oswald, Roy M., and Leas, Speed B., *The Inviting Church: a study of new member assimilation* (Washington: The Alban Institute, 1987).

Schaller, Lyle, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978)

Notebook

by Herb Miller



The list of worship service visitors is an excellent source of names for every church's membership prospect list. The best way to collect those names depends on the size of the congregation. Larger congregations need to do it one way; smaller congregations need to do it another way. The two methods are outlined below.

Over Eighty in Average Worship Attendance

A "Ritual of Friendship" pad in each pew is the most productive system for obtaining the names and addresses of worship service visitors in churches of eighty or more average morning-worship attendance. If used in the following ways, the Ritual of Friendship pad obtains 95 percent of the worship visitor information. The following pad model has the advantage of perforations

**If used in these ways,
the Ritual of
Friendship pad
obtains 95 percent of
the worship visitor
information.**

that allow an alphabetical arranging of names for easy recordkeeping.

Print the phrase "Ritual of Friendship" in the worship bulletin very early in the order of service (immediately above "Announcements" if you use such a feature in your worship service). At this point in the service, the pastor should say,

Obtaining Names and Addresses of Worship Visitors

"One of the things we value most in our church is the opportunity to know each other and extend a friendly welcome to those who worship with us. In order to help us do that, you will find at the outside end of each pew a 'Ritual of Friendship' pad. We ask that you pass this pad along the pew and that all worshippers, both members and visitors alike, write their names and addresses in the spaces provided. When the pad reaches the inside aisle, please pass it back to the other end of the pew, noting the names of the persons who are seated near you. This will give you the opportunity to greet and get acquainted with each other after the service."

This procedure takes into account the realities of human nature.

About 20 percent of the people who visit the worship services of any church enjoy resisting institutional systems. They get an emotional charge out of not doing what they are requested to do (that is the biggest reason why visitor cards in pew racks work so poorly.) But the "Ritual of Friendship" system raises the whole process to the level of an expression of friendliness—rather than merely another institutional manipulation procedure. Since virtually everyone wants to be known as a friendly person, the positive psychological aspects of the procedure counterbalance the tendency to resist such systems. With everyone in the pew (including members) writing on the pad, and with everyone knowing that everyone else will be looking at the names to see who is seated with them, very few people will fail to write in their names and addresses.

Avoid introducing the "Ritual of Friendship" part of the service with the phrase "sign the registration pad," since this institutional-sounding phrase carries negative psychological connotations for many people. Avoid saying, "We want people to sign their names so that we can visit their homes." Nor

should you ask them to sign their names so that you can have a record of their attendance. These approaches make the securing of names and addresses sound cold, impersonal, and institutional.

Churches that use a different worship leader each week will find it very difficult to get these persons to

**Everyone needs to
write his or her name
and address on the
pad--because this
encourages the
visitors to do it.**

say the right things (and prevent them from saying the wrong things) in their introduction of the "Ritual of Friendship" process. Some of these persons will think it is not important to say these same words each week—forgetting that the first-time visitors are always hearing them for the first time. In most churches, it is usually necessary, therefore, that the pastor always make the "Ritual of Friendship" announcement.

Before you establish this "Ritual of Friendship" practice, discuss with your church governing body and key leaders the purpose of the method. This helps long-term attenders understand the reason why everyone needs to write his or her name and address on the pad—because this encourages the visitors to do it.

Under Eighty in Average Worship Attendance

The "Ritual of Friendship" pad in the pews does not work as well in churches with less than eighty in average worship attendance. With fewer numbers of people, especially if the seating area is large, many of the worshippers do not sit close to

Please turn to page 8...

Notebook: Obtaining Names and Addresses of Worship Visitors . . .

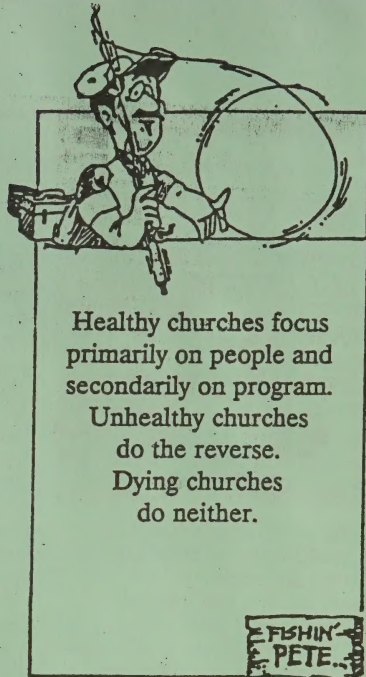
(Continued from page 6)

each other. Passing the "Ritual of Friendship" pads along the pews therefore does not "feel" right.

In this size of church, the pastor should pick two active members who attend regularly—people who are outgoing, caring, and are good at making small talk with strangers. The pastor should meet with these two persons and ask them to be certain that one of them, either before or after worship, visits with and gets the names and addresses of every first-time worship visitor and gives this information to the pastor after the service. If you ask two people to take responsibility for this, at least one of the two is likely to be in worship fifty-two weeks out of the year. Working as a team of two, they can obtain the names and addresses of all first-time worship visitors.

Membership Care

In a related but different matter, every church needs to have a care corps or shepherding group that is aware of and concerned about any regular members who (without any known reason) disappear from worship services for three weeks in a row. Without some kind of a sign-in system like that described above, leaders in large churches will find it impossible to provide that sort of membership concern. In a congregation of less than eighty average worship attendance, ask one person (often an older longtime member who knows everyone and usually sits toward the back of the sanctuary) to keep a record of who is present. That person phones the pastor on Monday with a list of members who have been absent three consecutive weeks.



Welcome-Folder Name Tags Reduce Insider/Outsider Communication Signals

At Community Church of Joy, Glendale, Arizona, the ushers hand a welcome folder to people on each row shortly after the service begins.

In addition to the usual information form, the folder contains 8 1/2-by-11-inch sheets, each of which contains ten peel-off, paper name tags (one of which is depicted at right at original size). The worship leader invites everyone to fill out the form and put on a name tag as the welcome folder moves down the row.

Tim Wright is senior associate and Walt Kallestad is pastor of this rapidly growing Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation.

Joy

Ritual of Friendship

You are important to us. We want to be a friendly church.

Directions:

1. Write your name, address, and phone number.
2. (✓) the appropriate information.
3. Pass the pad to the next person.
4. When it reaches the end of the pew, pass it back, noting the names of others.
5. After the benediction, greet your fellow-worshippers and introduce yourself.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Zip _____

☐ Adult - Married ☐ Youth 12-18
☐ Adult - Single ☐ Child under 12
☐ University Student

☐ Member
☐ Visitor
☐ Desire information about church
☐ Interested in membership
☐ Desire a pastoral call

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Zip _____

☐ Adult - Married ☐ Youth 12-18
☐ Adult - Single ☐ Child under 12
☐ University Student

☐ Member
☐ Visitor
☐ Desire information about church
☐ Interested in membership
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☐ Visitor
☐ Desire information about church
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☐ Desire a pastoral call

Name _____

Address _____

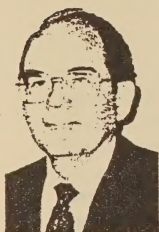
Phone _____ Zip _____

☐ Adult - Married ☐ Youth 12-18
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☐ University Student

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☐ Visitor
☐ Desire information about church
☐ Interested in membership
☐ Desire a pastoral call



VIEW FROM THE LARGE CHURCH



by Howard Gleason

Establishing an Effective Welcome Center

Gleason is pastor of St. Mark Presbyterian Church, Ballwin, Missouri.

If you attend a meeting at a hotel conference room that provides no information on the sponsoring organization, you might leave with mixed feelings. Don't they want new people? Is everyone too busy to prepare for first-time visitors? Were they even aware that you came?

A "welcome center" can help to counter that problem in churches, thus encouraging first-time worshippers to return.

To be effective, a welcome center needs the following:

Location. Plant the welcome center in the primary traffic pattern. In most churches, this is the narthex, vestibule, or main hallway. Our welcome center is in the narthex where everyone going to or from the sanctuary passes within a few feet of it.

Sign. A neat, large sign that rises high above the heads of people in a crowd—eight or nine feet off the floor—is essential. Since people approach the welcome

center sign from more than one direction, make it readable from two, three, or four sides.

Personnel. Staff the welcome center (before and after worship) with dependable, knowledgeable, smiling, and truly caring lay volunteers. They should remain at their post as

long as people are milling about. You need two or more persons, depending on the size of the church. (One of them occasionally needs to leave the center to help parents find classrooms for their children or to assist people in other ways.) Sufficient staffing ensures that every new person has a chance to talk to someone.

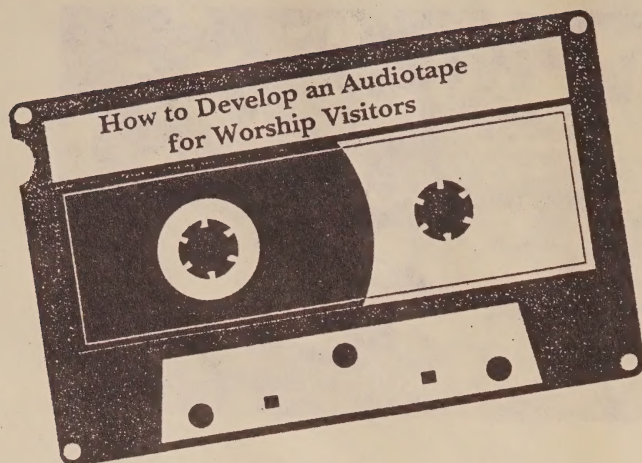
Equipment. This may be as simple as a table and a visible sign. If space and funds permit, erect a kiosk with a well-

lighted sign.

Materials. Determine the questions new people usually ask and prepare literature with answers. Some basics would include (a) information on your beliefs and denomination; (b) a list of Sunday school classes by age, subject matter, and location; (c) a summary of all your church's programs, including when and where they meet and how to become part of them; and (d) a floor plan of your building.

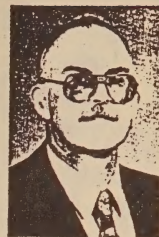
Supervision. Put someone or some committee in charge of the welcome center. This includes recruiting and training the volunteers, keeping materials available, keeping the equipment attractive, and evaluating effectiveness.

Establishing and maintaining a welcome center isn't difficult, and it will distinguish your church from many others for visitors who are "church shopping." 



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by Dewey Johnson



Johnson is the founding pastor of Sandia Presbyterian Church. A new congregation on the fast-growing northeast side of Albuquerque, New Mexico, it received a 1994 Sam and Helen Walton Grant for excellence in new-church development. The church began in 1988 with six people attending worship in an elementary school cafeteria. In 1995, worship attendance averaged about 400 in a new building.

In fall 1994 I began to think that we should do something to help our worship visitors find out more about our congregation, faster.

A year earlier I would not have thought this necessary. We mail an informative brochure to our first-time visitors. We also send our weekly newsletter to all visitors. Our bulletins are user-friendly, including explanations of ministries and activity groups. Yet as attendance grew I began hearing people in my monthly inquiry class express surprise when I explained the congregation's programs. "I didn't know this church did that! I'd like to be involved!"

I found such statements hard to fathom. In most cases, I had mentioned that ministry from the pulpit. The information brochure they received the first time they attended highlighted it. In some instances, we had explained that ministry in the newsletter and worship bulletin insert during the past two weeks. How many ways can you communicate a program?

Research and Production

At that point, I gathered a group of talented people and challenged them, "We are having a difficult time helping our visitors learn what sorts of programs we

have. How about making an audiotape that gives our visitors sixty minutes of information about our church! We could even let an Andy Rooney type gripe about my sermons!"

Mike Molony, a local radio personality, responded, "Won't work. You need to limit it to less than fifteen minutes or people won't listen. Put eleven or twelve minutes on a tape, give it to visitors on Sunday morning, and let them listen to it in the car on their way home from church." Molony's point of view won the day, and we have appreciated his comment ever since. (Some experts say you should limit such a tape to seven minutes, but we have had no trouble getting all sorts of people to listen to a twelve-minute presentation.) Our chief problem was how to maximize the impact of what we put into these twelve minutes.

Another member of the group, Jim Grigsby, edited a couple of *Air Force* magazines. Donna Cygan had a marketing background. After listening to a variety of ideas about tape content, they favored doing a congregational questionnaire. This survey, they said, would approach our task from the viewpoint of what our congregation likes and has discovered about our programs. They suggested that

we ask the congregation three questions. After we got the survey results, we could weave into the tape bits of congregational history, mission statement, and humor.

The rest of the group agreed with this approach, and we submitted the three questions to worshipers in a bulletin insert that we collected following the worship service. These questions were open-ended, not multiple choice. To help us deal with open-ended responses, the group brought in one of our church members who is a statistician.

Heather Allen not only owns the software to display in easy-to-understand fashion the results of such surveys; she has the ability to sift through responses quickly and categorize what has been said. She produced a two-page document called "Results of Sandia Presbyterian Church's October 1994 Survey" that then served as the guideline for what we put on the tape.

The first survey question asked, "What was it about your first visit to this church that made you want to come back?" In ranked order, the respondents said friendliness, the sermon, and general atmosphere. The second survey question was "What is it that you have come to value since you first started attending services

here?" The ranked answers: atmosphere, sermons, friendliness, Christian education. The third question—which got at the heart of my initial concern—was "What did you learn about after six months that you wish you'd known about in the first month?" The ranked answers: activities, Christian education, caring ministry (14 percent of our 480 adult members are Stephen Ministers).

We organized our audiotape around these answers. Cygan wrote the script. Grigsby edited it. Randy Martin, our sound adviser, was concerned about the tape's quality and where we should record it. Bob Proffitt donated the use of a local radio station's sound studio. Molony; my wife, Cheri; and I narrated it. Ed Honeycutt, whose business produces books on tape, handled the tapes, jackets, and artwork.*

Multiple Uses

During the Ritual of Friendship on Sunday mornings, I mention that we have a twelve-minute audiotape to which our visitors can listen on the way home or whenever they have time during the week. They can pick up the tapes on a table as they exit the sanctuary. An insert in the jacket urges them to return the tapes when they are finished (although we anticipate

the loss of significant numbers). Several tapes disappear from the table each Sunday; some make their way back.

Two interesting things have happened since we began using the tape: (a) Visitor participation in Sunday school has increased, and (b) newcomers whom we identify as perhaps needing a Stephen Minister seem more receptive to receiving one than in times past. The tape prepares the way for both activities. We have also received many compliments. Visitors say the tapes are helpful. An inquiry class member remarked, "That tape told me a lot! Where did you get the idea?"

Initially, we were so focused on first-time visitors that we did not think about people who have not yet attended. Now, however, members use it evangelistically to invite friends and coworkers to visit our services and classes. "Listen to this!" they say. "It will tell you all about my church."

The tape is also available to anyone involved in activities of community groups that use our building. For example, the tape is on a table with a "Take One"

sign when the neighborhood association meets, when choral groups and symphonies perform, and when the Cub Scout pack gathers.

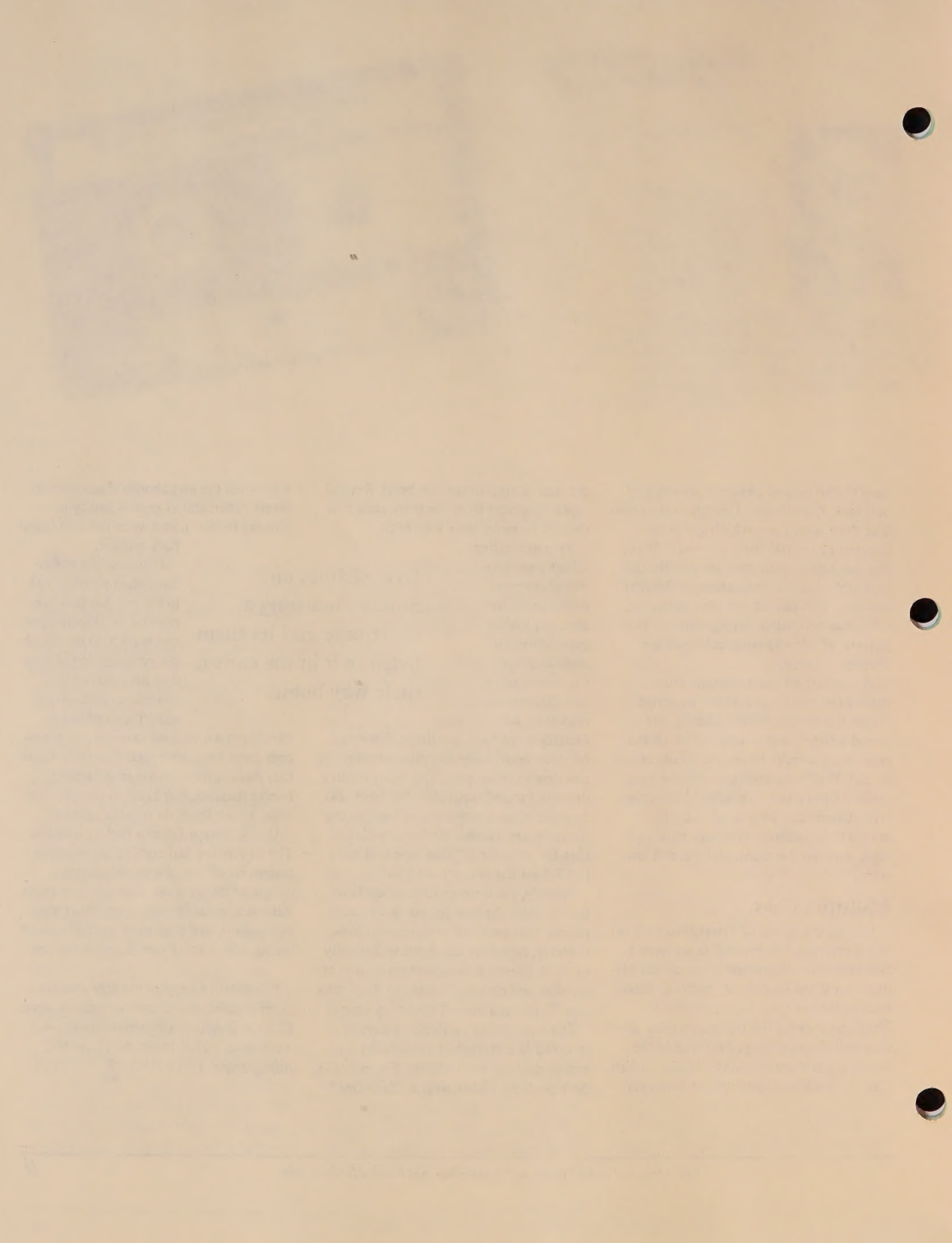
I also use the audiotape when people write to tell me that they are moving to Albuquerque and want to know about our congregation. I drop it in the mail to them, sometimes prefacing it with this explanation:

"Enclosed are reasons many of our members came back after their first visit; what they have come to value since; and in twelve minutes, just because we love you, what it took them six months to learn."

Our audiotape is not a perfect product. The committee had nothing on which to pattern its efforts. We would change a couple of things if we were doing it again. Yet the tape rarely fails to impress those who hear it, and it gives us a novel way of telling others about our church activities.

*To obtain a copy of the tape and the questionnaire results used to make it, send \$2.50 to Sandia Presbyterian Church—Audiotape, 10704 Paseo del Norte NE, Albuquerque, NM 87122. ✠

Give visitors on Sunday morning a short tape and let them listen to it in the car on their way home.





VIEW FROM THE LARGE CHURCH



Sorensen is executive associate pastor at Community Church of Joy, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation in Glendale, Arizona, whose weekend worship attendance

averages 3,000. Walt Kallestad is senior pastor.

Assimilating Newcomers at Community Church of Joy

by Paul Sorensen

Most people first attend our church (or as we call it, "Joy") because a friend invites them. They're not sure what they believe, but they need a place and they are invited. So they visit. They come skeptical. They come with lots of questions. And through the process of hearing the gospel and sensing the fellowship and the joy of Christianity, they are drawn into faith. Soon they realize that they are believers. That's our goal—to help people move across both the church barrier and the faith barrier.¹

Our congregation's mission statement is "That all may know Jesus Christ and become responsible members of his Church, we share his love with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit." The two key parts are that all may (1) know Christ and (2) become responsible members. Assimilation is the process of helping people not only to know Christ but to become responsible members.

Assimilation Is Evangelism

David Preus, former bishop of the American Lutheran Church, defined evangelism as "All that's involved in making believers out of unbelievers and making participants out of nonparticipants." That simple definition captures the essence of what we are trying to do at Joy.

C. Peter Wagner, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, suggests a similar definition: "All that's involved in bringing people who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ into fellowship with him and responsible church membership." Assimilating or integrating new members is that part of the evangelization process whose attitude and posture welcome newcomers. As you welcome someone into your home, your attitude asks, How can I make you feel comfortable? How can I make you feel at home here? Your congregation's assimilation and integration process is everything you do to

help people feel at home.

Our Members' Backgrounds

In a recent study, we found that 40 percent of our members had no previous church background. Another 25 percent haven't been a part of a church for five years or more. So 65 percent of our members come from an unchurched or "de-churched" background. Our goal is not just to help Lutherans become better Lutherans or to help Christians become better Christians. We are helping irreligious people discover God's incredible grace through Jesus Christ. This starting point significantly impacts how we do assimilation. We can't assume that people know the language and theology with which we grew up as Lutherans.

Assimilation Starting Points

People assimilate into the family of Joy

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Assimilating Newcomers at Community Church of Joy

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through a wide variety of channels. Some connect through a grief support group. Others attend a hayride or line dancing on Saturday night. We stay in touch with what community residents need because we realize that many people won't take their first step toward church by walking into worship. They are just too terrified. But they might come into a small group, or they might come into country dance lessons. When the roof doesn't cave in on them, they aren't judged, and people are smiling and having fun, they start asking, "Can just anybody come to your church service?" We try to provide our members with unlimited ways to invite friends and neighbors. So we encourage members to be aware of what's going on that might interest the people they wish to invite.

Because assimilating newcomers takes limitless forms, a multiple-method process works best. At the same time, we follow a highly organized procedure to help people assimilate. Once someone walks through our doors as a first-time worship visitor, a pattern consisting of several intentional actions helps him or her feel welcome.

First, we offer each member and guest a welcome folder. Every Sunday morning we begin the service with Psalm 118:24: "This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it" (NKJV). Then we invite people to greet one another. After they are seated, we say, "As the ushers are passing out the welcome folders, please take an opportunity to fill out the information requested." Each folder contains pull-off name tags. Not everyone uses them, but the name tags give people the opportunity to let others know who they are. We offer the same name tags for members and visitors, because we don't

want anyone to feel part of either the "in" group or the "out" group.

During worship announcement time, we say, "If you would like to learn more about Joy and what's available for you, or you have any questions about the church, pull this green card out and check *special event A*." We provide this option because some may have arrived late and missed the welcome folders. If they mark A on the green cards, we contact them within a brief time by phone.

People who report that they are first-time visitors receive a letter from Pastor Walt. We enter their names on computer, and one of our volunteers calls them within two days. The first-time call is very simple:

"Hello, this is Kathy calling from Community Church of Joy. I want to thank you for coming. We are delighted that you joined us. Do you have any questions about the church?"

If we do nothing more than say "welcome," we've done our job. If they show some interest in our church or a specific ministry, we note that and write "P" for *prospect* on the form. If they are visiting from another church or are not interested, we write "D" for *delete*—so that their

name will be taken off the computer. If they are interested in membership, we write "IIM."

Our research reveals that 34 percent of first-time guests who get a call from the pastor within two days will return next

Sunday. But if they receive a call from a layperson, 68 percent will come back! Why? The pastor is viewed as a "salesperson." Because the layperson is seen as a "satisfied customer," he or she is more influential with newcomers. However, the

pastor may be more effective when calling people who are interested in membership. If you change nothing else in your assimilation process, start phoning first-time visitors. They appreciate that you care enough to say "we're glad you came."

We place on our mailing list the guests coded as prospects (P). Prior to our newcomer orientations, Pastor Walt sends them a letter of invitation. (We announce the upcoming newcomer orientation every Sunday morning.)

If the worship guests we telephone express a specific need (e.g., personal crisis or a desire to register their children for classes), the caller writes the request on a memo. Our staff makes certain the memo is quickly delivered to the appropriate department leader or pastor.

In addition to our first-time visitor phone calls and our calls to people interested in membership, about every six months we phone people who have been on our prospect list for a while. Many of our regular guests want to attend an orientation, but they need a gentle reminder. The calls and letters provide that encouragement.

Newcomer Orientations

We offer newcomer orientations one time each month on Sunday afternoon from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. Not everyone who attends wants to become a member. Some just want to learn more about the church. But those who choose to be members are received into membership the following Sunday morning.

We try to make our three-hour newcomer orientation fun, relational, inspirational, and informational.² After attending the newcomer orientation, members who choose to do so can attend two other seminars on Sunday afternoons. The next month they can attend "How to Deepen Your Friendship with God." The following month's topic is "How to Discover Your God-Given Potential." After attend-

Assimilation is helping people not only to know Christ but to become responsible members.

ing all three, they can become a part of our leadership group, the Circle of Eagles.

The overall purpose of the orientations and seminars is to launch people into a growth and/or volunteer opportunity. They may sign up for a class like "Discover the Bible" or "Discover Jesus" or join a small group. The newcomer orientation is not the end; it is the launching pad for a process of growth and service in the church. Many people do not place a high value on membership. Some avoid being members, but they want to get involved. So we use this process to help people get involved—with the ultimate goal that they become incorporated members.

The Sunday Seminars

Over the years our staff members have tested a variety of processes for our newcomer orientation. We've tried long seminars and short seminars. Two key issues emerged: (1) Is it offered at a convenient time? (2) How often do we offer it? We chose Sunday afternoon, because that is when most people can attend. If we make the time very convenient but only offer the orientation once a year, we miss a lot of people. So we try to do both. We offer it at a convenient time, and we offer it often enough that when people have a conflict on a particular weekend they can still attend soon.

Each seminar is summarized below.

Seminar I: Newcomer Orientation.

Our theme is "To Discover God's Grace." We hope that by the end of this seminar participants will commit to active church participation. We hope that they will not only become members but will discover some of the ways that they can become involved and continue to grow. The topics we cover:

- The Story of Joy.
- The Vision of Joy. From the very beginning they know our mission and

use.

• What Makes Joy Tick? We offer a section on our Lutheran heritage. Many people have come from other backgrounds. We discuss what Lutherans believe and how the Lutheran Church came about.

• Opportunities for Involvement. We invite our staff leaders to talk about some of the growth and volunteer opportunities.

• Your Spiritual Journey. A spiritual journey sheet helps us. They fill this out on two pages. They keep one and turn in one. From this we can decide what kind of classes would help. For example, if many of our newcomers are new to the faith, we will soon offer a "Discover the Bible" class.

• Get-Acquainted Times. We want them to make at least four friends during the orientation. We also give them an opportunity to fill out a "Newcomer Information Sheet" and a "Membership Transfer Card."

Seminar II: How To Deepen Your Friendship with God. This second seminar focuses on how to grow in Christ, what a personal relationship with Christ means, and how to go about getting to know him better. We talk about daily devotions. Right away we are introducing them to prayer, how to have a conversation with God. This is a great opportunity for the unchurched and churched alike to deepen their friendship with God.

We ask participants at the end of this seminar to consider a commitment of practicing daily devotions. We also introduce tithing and how they might begin the process. We talk about growth through classes, small groups, and seminars. We introduce them to some classes that might make those steps easier, such as "Discover the Bible."

Seminar III: How to Discover Your

God-Given Potential. Have you ever asked someone to teach Sunday school and had them respond with, "Been there. Done that"? It seems that they've attempted serving in the church, but it didn't connect for them so they have checked out.

We want to help people connect with their gifts. When they find their gifts and utilize those gifts, they find great joy in serving. Therefore, our theme for this third seminar is "To Equip People for Ministry." At the end of the seminar, we ask people to make a commitment to ministry involvement of some kind.

The manual *Discover Your God-Given Potential* is their actual guide for the course. The manual contains the SHAPE outline.

S = Spiritual Gifts. Each participant completes a Wagner Hout spiritual gifts survey.

H = Heart. We challenge each person: What really motivates you?

A = Aptitude. What do you have an aptitude for; what are your talents and natural abilities?

P = Personality. Are you an extrovert? Introvert? (We draw upon the Gary Smalley/John Trent personality inventory, which uses animals—the golden retriever,

beaver, otter, and lion—to represent different personality types. We help each person think about how personality influences his or her call in life.)

E = Experience.

What experiences

have you had? Maybe you've been through a time of brokenness and can bring healing to others through that experience.

After this seminar, volunteer counselors meet with each participant and talk through his or her SHAPE outline. We help each person connect his or her uniqueness with opportunities.

If you change nothing else in your assimilation process, start phoning first-time visitors.

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Where can we obtain "Estimate of Giving" cards
and Consecration Sunday program materials?

Those materials are now published by Abingdon Press and distributed by Cokesbury: 800/672-1789. They are no longer available from the Net Results Resource Center.

Assimilating Newcomers at Community Church of Joy

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The Circle of Eagles

After people complete Seminar III, we welcome them into our Circle of Eagles. This is not some elite spiritual group. This group of people have made the commitment to learn and grow; they want to be more involved with the church. They receive a certificate and an eagle pin. We invite them to attend our Circle of Eagles meetings (50 to 100 people gather every x to eight weeks).

The Circle of Eagles meets on Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and begins with a continental breakfast. In these meetings, our pastors rekindle the vision. We share some of the latest updates. We answer questions. We pray together. This is not a decision-making group but people

who are getting a sense of the vision of Joy. Out of that group, we draw some of our leaders.

The Bottom Line

We use two words interchangeably—*integration* and *assimilation*. We don't mean to imply by *assimilation* that everybody at Joy looks the same. We are a blend of people with many different tastes and backgrounds. But we're all working for the same goal: To become all God dreamed for us to be.

When that happens, both evangelism and assimilation happen, and Joy's mission statement is achieved. People know Jesus Christ and become responsible members of his Church.

Notes

1. Each spring, the congregation sponsors a popular leadership conference that includes workshops on a variety of evangelism-related topics. Obtain dates and information from our church (see the phone number or address in note #2).

2. The booklet titled *Newcomer Orientation* is available for \$15 (includes shipping; Arizona residents add 6.8% sales tax) by contacting Community Church of Joy, 16635 North 51st Avenue, Glendale, AZ 85306; phone 800/515-5553 or 602/938-1460. 

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